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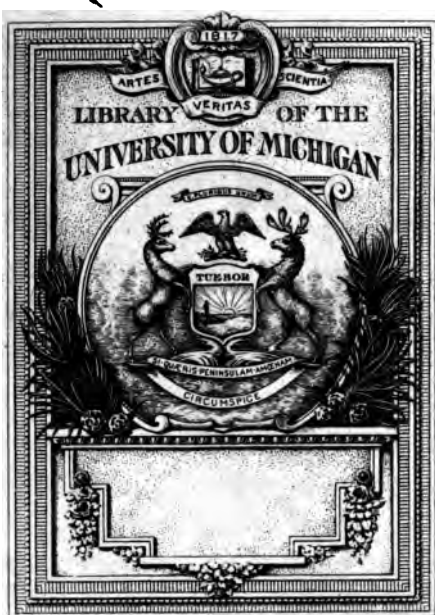
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FROM MITCHELL KENNERLEY
CHRISTMAS 1918



NOTES ON THE
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Williamson
BY W. N. C. CARLTON



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THE BRIDGEWATER HOUSE LIBRARY



WHEN it became known that Mr. Henry E. Huntington had purchased the Bridgewater House Library, it was not generally realized what a precious addition he had made to his already unrivalled collection of early English literature. Although Payne Collier had catalogued it and Carew Hazlitt had ranked it with the Britwell and Huth collections in quality and importance, the fame of the Bridgewater Library had been in the shadow for some years. References to it in the literature of collecting and bibliophily are strangely sparse and fragmentary, and tantalizing in their incompleteness. A full, descriptive account of the Library as a whole is greatly to be desired, and it is to be hoped that some one with access to the sources will eventually prepare such an account. Meantime, some of the scattered facts available to everyone are here brought together as a partial answer to the ques-

tions: What is the Bridgewater collection? Who formed it? and Where is it now?—questions which have been of frequent occurrence lately.

The collection derives its name from the titles borne by its original owners, members of the Egerton family, who, during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, were successively Earls and Dukes of Bridgewater. Early in the nineteenth century these titles lapsed, and much of the vast Bridgewater property, including the library, passed to a branch of the family whose chief representative was created Earl of Ellesmere, in 1846. Bridgewater House, a beautiful structure designed by Sir Charles Barry, the architect of the present Houses of Parliament, is the London residence of the Earls of Ellesmere and is situated in Cleveland Row, near the Green Park, to the south of Piccadilly.

The founder of the Bridgewater Library was Sir Thomas Egerton (1540?–1617), a natural son of Sir Richard Egerton of Ridley, in Cheshire, by one Alice Sparke. Educated at Oxford, he prepared for the bar at Lincoln's Inn, and in the course of his long and honorable career he attained the highest

offices and honors of his profession. During the reign of Queen Elizabeth he filled the important posts of attorney-general, solicitor-general, master of the rolls, and lord keeper of the great seal. Upon the accession of King James the First, Egerton was appointed lord high chancellor of England, and elevated to the peerage as Baron Ellesmere. On November 7, 1616, he was advanced to the dignity of Viscount Brackley.

Egerton's public position and duties brought him into constant and intimate relations with the literary men of his time, particularly the poets and dramatists. As a consequence his name is frequently met with in the poetry of the period, and in numerous dedicatory epistles, sonnets, and epigrams. Amongst others, Ben Jonson wrote three epigrams in his honor. In his *Timber*, Jonson described Egerton as "a grave and great orator, and best when he was provoked." Among the works of Samuel Daniel is *An Original Letter . . . sent to Lord Keeper Egerton with a present of his Works newly augmented*, 1601, extant in the Bridgewater Library. Daniel also composed an epistle in verse

in honor of the lord keeper in which the latter is addressed as:

“Great Keeper of the state of Equity,
Refuge of mercy, upon whom relies
The succour of oppressed misery;
Altar of safeguard, whereto affliction flies
From th’ eager pursuit of severity;
Haven of peace that labour’st to withdraw
Justice from out the tempests of the Law.”

John Davies of Hereford dedicated his *Summa Totalis*. . . or an Addition to *Mirum in Modum*, London, 1607, to Lord and Lady Ellesmere in a laudatory sonnet, and the presentation copy contains a number of manuscript changes and additions in Davies’ own hand. Sir John Davies, author of *Nosce Teipsum*, dedicated his *Orchestra* to Egerton. The dedicatory sonnet is in manuscript in the Bridgewater copy, and is not printed in the ordinary edition. Egerton’s “consideration for deserving young barristers is illustrated by the invariable kindness which he showed to Francis Bacon, who acknowledged his ‘fatherly care’ when writing of him in 1596. In 1606, Egerton worked hard to

secure the attorney-generalship for Bacon, but although he met with no success, his openly displayed patronage was of assistance to Bacon at the Bar."

An incident of high literary interest associated with the lord keeper's career was the visit of Queen Elizabeth to his house at Harefield, July 31–August 3, 1602. As was customary on the occasion of such royal visits, an elaborate programme of entertainment was carried out with great pomp and pageantry throughout the four days. The event that marks the royal visit as a memorable one in literary history was the first recorded performance of Shakespeare's *Othello* by "Burbidges players," who, with Shakespeare himself almost certainly amongst them, had been specially brought down from London to give the play before the Queen.

Everywhere in the literature of the time evidence is found that his contemporaries looked upon Sir Thomas Egerton as a generous, appreciative and discriminating lover of learning and patron of letters. It was, therefore, quite natural that he

should be the recipient of many of the writings of the men of letters of his day; and these contemporary copies, presented by their authors, gave to his library a flavor and interest which it will never lose. In addition to the books gathered by Lord Chancellor Egerton himself, his library was increased by the books brought to him by his third wife, the Dowager Countess of Derby, who, as Alice Spencer and Lady Strange, was a well-known patroness of Elizabethan literature. Spenser's *Tears of the Muses* is associated with her name. The character of the noble founder of the Bridgewater Library has been admirably summarized in the following words: "His apprehension was keen and ready, his judgment deep and sound, his reason clear and comprehensive, his elocution eloquent and easy. As a lawyer he was prudent in council, extensive in information, honest in principle, so that while he lived he was excelled by none; and when he died he was lamented by all."

Lord Ellesmere died at York House, in the Strand, on March 15, 1617, and was succeeded by his son John, who, on May 27, 1617, was created Earl of

Bridgewater. The Earl improved the fine library which he had inherited, and in the contemporary dedications of books to him, it is evident that he had some reputation as a patron of literature. In 1635, one "R.C." dedicated to him, in an elaborate poem, a translation of Seneca. John Vicars' *Babel's Balm*, London, 1624, is also dedicated to this Earl, and Collier's *Catalogue* reproduces his autograph from the copy in the Bridgewater collection. Many of the rarer seventeenth century books in the Bridgewater collection were collected by him, and his affection for them is shown by the marks and notes he made in most of the volumes that he added to the Library.

On June 26, 1631, the Earl was nominated president of the council of Wales with an official residence at Ludlow Castle in Shropshire. In 1634 he made his public entrance into the Principality and a sumptuous entertainment was given at the Castle to celebrate the event. Following the fashionable practice of the time a masque formed part of the festivities. As is well known, this form of entertainment was an exhibition in which pageantry

and music predominated, but in which dialogue was introduced as accompaniment or explanation. Henry Lawes, at that time the most celebrated composer in England, was asked to write the music for the intended masque, and he, in turn, applied to his young friend John Milton for a text to accompany the music. The result was the superb masque of *Comus*, of which Masson says, "much as Milton wrote afterwards, he never wrote anything more beautiful, more perfect." Mark Pattison makes the interesting observation that "it was a strange caprice of fortune that made the future poet of the Puritan epic the last composer of a cavalier masque." The masque was acted on Michaelmas night (September 29), 1634, before the Earl, his family, and guests. Three of his children took part in it, viz.: Viscount Brackley had the part of the Elder Brother, Thomas Egerton that of the Second Brother, and Lady Alice Egerton that of The Lady. Henry Lawes played the Attendant Spirit. From what is known of the Egerton family, it is certain that there was an unusual aptitude among its members for amusements of this kind, and of the family

generally it may be said that it was one of the most accomplished in the English aristocracy of the seventeenth century.

No record is extant as to how the masque was received by those who saw it first presented, but we have Lawes' testimony that copies were soon in such demand that in order to save himself the labor of making transcripts he determined to print it. Accordingly, the first edition of *Comus* was published in 1637 with a dedication by Lawes to the Viscount Brackley, who had played the part of the Elder Brother when the masque was originally performed at Ludlow Castle three years previously.

At the sale of duplicates from the library of Mr. Huntington, in February, 1918, the most notable title offered was a copy of this first issue of *Comus*. The sale catalogue said of it: "This volume was probably the Dedication Copy and has been, so far as can be traced, in the Bridgewater Library since it was first published." The sensation aroused in the book world by the revelation and sale of this Bridgewater *Comus* will long be remembered. For

weeks it was the principal topic of discussion wherever bookmen assembled. The volume was purchased by Mr. George D. Smith for \$9,200.00 and later passed into the possession of Mr. H. V. Jones. With such a brilliant introduction to the world of collectors the future history of this remarkable copy will be watched with interest.

In due time the young Lord Brackley succeeded his father, becoming second Earl of Bridgewater and a loyal adherent to the Royalist cause during the Civil Wars. Sir Henry Chauncy, the historian of Hertfordshire, describes him as "adorned with a modest and grave aspect, a sweet and pleasant countenance, a comely presence," and as being "a learned man who delighted much in his library." In keeping with the Egerton traditions he, too, was a liberal patron of scholars and men of letters. Throughout the eighteenth century the library continued in the possession of the family, being constantly added to and kept in good condition through binding or rebinding as occasion required.

One of its later owners was Francis, third Duke of Bridgewater (1736-1803), the noted founder of


British inland navigation through his construction of the celebrated canal that bears his name and which realized such a princely fortune for himself and his successors. Interesting glimpses of him and his forceful personality are to be found in the memoirs and correspondence of his contemporaries. One such is the following, which occurs in a letter from Lady Stafford to Lord Granville Leveson Gower, November 23, 1793: "The Duke of Bridgewater arrived here two days ago as great a treat as ever, and a good deal more indolent, for I do not believe that his Grace's Face has undergone the Operation of washing these last two Months." Writing again a week later, Lady Stafford gives us this further picture of her guest: "His Grace of Bridgewater is with us, not *less* positive, nor *less* prejudiced than usual. * * * His Want of Religion makes him an Object of Pity. I do not mean that he does not believe in God, but there he is with the Gout and a Disorder in his Stomach, and Death and Immortality never occupy his Thoughts or Words, and he Swears!" This third and last Duke of Bridgewater died un-

married and devised most of his houses and pictures to his nephew, George Granville, Marquis of Stafford (afterwards first Duke of Sutherland), with reversion to the latter's second son, known successively as Lord Francis Leveson Gower, as Lord Francis Egerton, and as the first Earl of Ellesmere (1800-1857).

This nobleman put his inherited wealth to generous uses in many ways. Men of genius always found in him sympathy and understanding. He built a beautiful gallery at Bridgewater House for the magnificent collection of paintings which he had inherited and freely admitted the public to it. He was the first president and a staunch supporter of the Camden Society.

While in his possession the Library came to be well known in the book world and so continued until the later decades of the nineteenth century. It is to him that we owe the still interesting catalogue prepared by John Payne Collier, viz.: *A Catalogue, Bibliographical and Critical, of Early English Literature; Forming a Portion of the Library at Bridgewater House, the Property of the Rt. Hon.*

Lord Francis Egerton, M. P. London. Thomas Rodd, 1837. Of this work an edition of fifty copies was privately printed for distribution among friends and scholars interested in its subject matter. In the preface, Collier gave some interesting facts regarding the history of the Bridgewater collection, and in explanation of the narrow scope of the *Catalogue* he wrote: "The undertaking has been limited to early English Literature, because it is a department which, though less understood than some others, has of late years attracted much attention, both in this and in foreign countries. Had a wider field been chosen, it would have been difficult to limit the work to any reasonable proportions; and even now, not a few productions, particularly such as are of a graver cast and of larger dimensions, are not included. It was thought that the materials supplied by them would not accord with the lighter subjects of tracts in verse and prose, with which the Library is peculiarly well furnished. Upon the intrinsic value and admitted curiosity of many of the productions embraced in the *** *Catalogue*, it is not necessary to dwell:



these points are treated under the respective titles, and such other information is communicated, either regarding the author or his work, as the editor thought it necessary to supply. Not a few volumes, there is every reason to believe, are unique; and peculiarities which give known productions additional interest are pointed out with that diligence which an ardent and ancient love for bibliographical pursuits was likely to produce."

When, twenty-five years later, Collier compiled his well-known *Bibliographical and Critical Account of the Rarest Books in the English Language* (London, 1865, 2 volumes), he included in it all the titles and notes contained in the *Bridge-water Catalogue* of 1837. In the later work he gives further interesting details regarding the Bridgewater books. It appears that before the collection came into the possession of the Earl of Ellesmere some highly important books had been removed from it under the mistaken impression that they were duplicates. "These supposed duplicates, generally marked in a somewhat peculiar manner by John, first Earl of Bridgewater, were

to be found on the shelves of several booksellers, or in private hands, and two or three occurred in sale-lists not long after the preparation of the *Bridgewater Catalogue*. One of these may be specified as the finest copy of the *Sonnets* of Shakespeare (4to, 1609) that has ever been seen, and I had the satisfaction of purchasing it for Lord Ellesmere. Having also a noble collection of old plays (though much impaired when imaginary duplicates were incautiously extruded), his Lordship was at all times anxious to restore them to their ancient places at any price, and he commissioned me to secure such relics for him. He besides applied a considerable sum every year to the formation of a separate library, especially devoted to the illustration of Shakespeare and our early stage. This most agreeable duty Lord Ellesmere assigned to me; and had not the Commission on the British Museum intervened * * * this design might have advanced considerably farther towards completion. The difficulty was to procure the books, so rare and costly had the best of them become, but Lord Ellesmere did not hesitate to

purchase any work I recommended. There never, perhaps, existed a more confiding or bountiful patron; and, after an intercourse of more than thirty years, I may venture to say, with affectionate humility, that the only fault of his character was having too high an estimate of those who were interested in misguiding him, and too little reliance upon his own unswayed convictions."

For three hundred years this remarkable assemblage of books was kept together, remaining continuously in the possession of the family of its founder until 1917. It then passed through purchase to Mr. Henry E. Huntington, and that part of the collection which he will retain for his library will remain forever one of the literary treasures of America, and one to which English scholars of all countries will make frequent pilgrimages in years to come.

During 1918 a considerable number of the Bridgewater books came into the market through Mr. Huntington's sale of duplicates and surplus copies from the numerous collections he had purchased *en bloc*. His seventh consignment of such duplicates was sold by the Anderson Galleries, Inc., on

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